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Ireland's Top Places to Eat: the Restaurants and Cafes Serving the Very Best Food in the Country

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The 100 best places to eat in Ireland

From fish-finger sandwiches to fine dining, we recommend the restaurants and cafes serving the best food in the country

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Catherine Cleary, Aoife McElwain



Video	Images
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Good value: * indicates main course for under €15

CAFES

Hatch and Sons Irish Kitchen*

The Little Museum of Dublin, 15 St Stephens Green, Dublin 2. 01-6610075. hatchandsons.co

⋮ The people behind Hatch and Sons could just have traded on their looks, with their basement kitchen on Stephens Green like a timepiece from an *Upstairs Downstairs* set. But they reached a bit further and made the cafe at the bottom of The Little Museum of Dublin a showpiece for Irish ingredients. The beef and Guinness stew is the best kind of rib-sticking early supper on a Wednesday or Thursday when they're open till 9pm. Regular evening events put a single Irish ingredient centre stage. **CC**

The Fumbally*

Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8. 01-529 8732. thefumbally.ie

The magic in the Fumbally unfolded slowly when Aisling Rogerson and Luca D'Alfonso who had run the cafe in the nearby Dublin Food Co-op took over a corner building and started serving falafel. In better economic times the place would have been a convenience store. Good food times followed and Fumbally alumni have spread across the city, improving food in at least one college canteen and at market stalls, pop-ups and cafes. The Wednesday suppers from around the world are some of Dublin's best value dining. **CC**

Aisling
Rogerson
and
Luca
D'Alfonso
in
The
Fumbally

Café Hans*

Rockside, Moore Lane St, Cashel, Co Tipperary. 062-63660. chezhans.net

Towns can lure us busy bees off a motorway with the honey trap of a cafe that makes us glad we took a break from the road. cafe Hans, a second generation family-run place in Cashel, Co Tipperary is exactly the kind of reward you want for leaving the conveyor belt of the M8, or dicing with the parking gods if you're a local heading into town. Soups and salads can be so ordinary in other places. In cafe Hans they're definitely not. Lovely ingredients, expertly cooked and served in a simple, friendly place. Prepare for a spell in the dentist-like waiting area at busy times. **CC**

ADVERTISEMENT

Sweet Beat Café

Bridge Street, Sligo. 071-913 8795. sweetbeat.ie

The narrative that everything good happens in Dublin while the rest of the country is slowly turning to one big Super Macs gets disrupted by places such as Sweet Beat. Carolanne Rushe's bright corner cafe in Sligo town puts heart and craft into the veg by applying the same principles that work with any other offering: cook it from scratch with the best ingredients. Their chilli hummus is a work of art and they sell it by the tub. Lots of pomegranate pretenders are riding the clean eating wave with joyless sweaty quinoa salads. Sweet Beat is banging a better drum. **CC**

Sweet
Beat
Café,
Co
Sligo

The Pepperpot Café

The Powerscourt Centre, Dublin 2. 01-707 1610. thepepperpot.ie

There's been a small landgrab by the Pepperpot Café in Dublin's Powerscourt Centre. They've annexed a bit of the landing around the corner to cope with demand for their tables. You'll still have to queue at busy times for a pear and bacon sandwich. Their housemade bagels are the best, followed closely by the fresh scones, which should not be eaten without a generous dollop of whipped cream and an anointment of jam. Those original tables on the landing overlooking the main area are best for a spot of light people watching. **CC**

Fia

155b Rathgar Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6. 01-441 3344. fia.ie

I got an email from a colleague about Fia last year. It's a cafe, he wrote, run by a "quite shy" chef called Keith Coleman, who regularly cooked the Fumbally suppers. It me took a while to get there, but when I did it was heartening confirmation of how good our young cafe scene has become in recent years. Coleman teams great vegetables from McNally Family Farm with Gubbeen cheese and cured meats and Le Levain sourdough. It's a holy trinity of good eating. And there are daily specials that are worth the trip to this in-between stretch of road between Rathmines and Rathgar. **CC**

Fia,
Dublin
6

Brother Hubbard North & South

153 Capel Street, Dublin 1 and 46 Harrington Street, Dublin 2. brotherhubbard.ie

Since Garrett Fitzgerald and his partner James Boland opened the doors of their mostly vegetarian Middle Eastern influenced Capel Street cafe in 2012, they have been busy. They have brought their style to the southside (what began as Sister Sadie was rebranded last year as Brother Hubbard South), they've bottled their jams and chutneys, they've added Middle East Feast suppers to their service, they've written and released a cookbook, and they've helped to launch Dublin's best healthy take-away service, Piply (piply.ie). That's a lot to pack in to five delicious years. What will the next five bring? **CC & AMcE**

Two Pups Coffee

74 Francis Street, Dublin 8. facebook.com/twopupscoffee

I recently fell into Two Pups with a sour outlook on the hipster coffee scene and their commitment to anything beyond the roasted bean. A few forkfuls of their winter vegetable stew with sour dough toast and I was properly contrite. There's a small kitchen at the back where gold standard ingredients are turned into truly tasty breakfast and lunch fare, from scratch. The daily dahl with ginger and coconut milk is something I will try to replicate at home. And when I can't make it taste as good, I'll head back to Two Pups. **CC**

Meet Me In The Morning

50 Pleasants Street, Dublin 8. facebook.com/meetmeinthe morningcafe

This serene little cafe, named after a Bob Dylan song, is tucked away on the calm of Pleasants Street, just close enough to the buzz of busy Camden Street. Brian O’Keeffe, the 2014 Irish Brewers’ Cup champion, opened this cafe in early 2016 after returning home from Paris. Artist and cook Fiona Hallinan helped develop the menu, and now chef Kevin Powell is in the kitchen. The menu is small but special, from their brown rice bowls served with tempura kalettes, pickles, spiced peanuts and sesame crumb, to their doughnuts made in-house every weekend, to their signature Nut Eile spread on sourdough toast. **AMcE**

ADVERTISEMENT

Two Boys Brew

375 North Circular Road, Dublin 7. twoboysbrew.ie

Locals were very cross indeed when the word got out about the super weekend brunch at Two Boy Brew in Phibsborough. It’s hard to keep something this good a secret for long. Owners Kevin Roche and Taurean Coughlan moved back to Dublin in 2014 after living in Melbourne for more than four years. Channeling everything they’d learned along the way, they got everything right at Two Boys Brew: the decor, the coffee and the food. Expect blueberry and ricotta hotcakes, slow cooked beef cheek sandwiches and The Boys Smoky Beans. **AMcE**

Cloud Café

43 North Strand Road, Dublin 1. 089-220 4588. cloudcafe.ie

You have to love a cafe that offers avocado on toast on their breakfast menu alongside a sausage sandwich. Cloud Café on the North Strand does a super version of both classics from the opposite end of the brunch spectrum. The sausage sandwich comes on an Arún Bakery brioche bun with sweet pickled red onion and excellent herb-flecked sausages. The avocado toast is great. Food waste from this lovely new cafe goes to the compost heap in the Mud Island Community Garden behind, where growers have turned wasteland into a beautiful vegetable and fruit garden. A visit to both on a Saturday afternoon was inspiring. **CC**

3FE

32 Grand Canal Street Lower, Dublin 2. 3fe.com

When Colin Harmon left his job in investment banking in 2008 to open a little coffee bar in the ground floor of The Twisted Pepper (now Wigwam) on Middle Abbey Street, few may have predicted 3fe would blossom into a two store business (with another on the way in Harold’s Cross) and a coffee roastery supplying some of the best cafes around Ireland. Harmon and his team have been changing tastes and perceptions of what a good cup of coffee is along the way. Their flagship cafe on Grand Canal Street has food as good as their coffee, its menu developed by executive chef Hilary O’Hagan-Brennan and head chef Holly Dalton. **AMcE**

Bibi’s

14b Emorville Avenue, Dublin 8. bibis.ie

Bibi’s always feels dreamy. There’s something about the way the sun comes through its windows, reflecting off the red bricks of the neighbouring houses on this quiet Portobello street, that makes time here seem to slow down. For the customers anyway. Since opening in

2010, Bibi's has been serving plates piled high with French toast made with Tartine Organic Bakery bread and bowls of luscious Turkish eggs. With their aesthetically pleasing food and Cloudpicker coffee served on clay pottery made in the UK, Maisha Lenehan and team have been creating Instagrammable dishes before that was even a thing. **AMcE**

Camerino Bakery & Café

158 Capel Street, Dublin 2. 01-5377755. camerino.ie

Caryna Camerino started baking to cope with a stressful job. As the job became more stressful, there were just too many cakes for her co-workers to get through. So she started selling her excess raspberry cheesecake brownies at a couple of markets around Dublin. Business boomed. She eventually quit the stressful job and, after supplying other cafes for a couple of years, she opened Camerino Bakery on Capel Street in 2013. Her raspberry cheesecake brownies are on sale alongside her exquisite scones and delicious sandwiches made with her homemade challah bread, and well-made coffee using Roasted Brown beans. **AMcE**

Caryna
Camerino
in
Camerino
Bakery

Assassination Custard

19 Kevin Street, Dublin 8. 087-9971513. facebook.com/assassinationcustard

Ken Doherty and his partner Gwen McGrath took over this tiny cafe in October 2015, serving up inventive Mediterranean and Middle Eastern inspired small plates, such as n'duja rolls, labneh with date syrup and plates of radicchio with blood orange and ricotta salata. With just two tables and less than 10 seats, it's not just the plates that are small. You'll try an ingredient you've never tried before or rediscover a flavour you forgot you loved. All in the space of a quick, affordable lunchtime. Open Monday to Friday, noon to 3pm. **AMcE**

ADVERTISEMENT

Bean in Dingle

Green Street, Dingle, Co Kerry. 087-2992831. beanindingle.com

Justin and Luke Burgess opened Bean In Dingle in June 2015 with a mission to supply Dingle with more options for speciality coffee. Working closely with Cork-based coffee roasters Badger & Dodo, the Burgess brothers and their sister Georgia serve up flat whites and filter coffees throughout the year. The food is limited to hot porridge in the morning, with a DIY topping bar, and plenty of locally supplied sweet treats such as cinnamon rolls from Orla Gowen's excellent BÁCÚS Bakery, just down the road on Green Street. This is the place for a brew in the Kingdom of Kerry. **AMcE**

Canteen

30 Mallow Street, Limerick. 085-2153212. www.wearecanteen.com

After a stint in Heston Blumenthal's The Fat Duck, chef Paul Williams was inspired by the UK trend of healthy fast food and set up Canteen in 2012. This compact cafe selects the best of Irish ingredients, such as Riot Rye sourdough and Crowe's outdoor reared pork, and uses it to fulfil their mission of good food, fast. Think avo' egg pots, smokey chilli chicken wraps and Persian stews. Williams has gathered a small but powerful squad around him, particularly his head barista Dalton Greene who pairs Mossfield Organic milk with Badger & Dodo beans for his impeccable milky coffees. **AMcE**

Established Coffee

54 Hill Street, Belfast BT1 2LD. www.established.coffee

Established Coffee was kind of my gateway drug to Belfast last year. I was so fired up by its drool-worthy Instagram feed of savoury breakfast waffles and single origin filter coffees that I

headed up the M1 to see what the story was. I ended up falling for Belfast and its people in the process. Run by Bridgeen Barbour and Mark Ashbridge, this coffee shop is one of the best in the North or South in terms of quality of coffee and food to match it. Just do yourself a favour and follow them on Instagram (@establishedcoffee). **AMcE**

Pudding Row

Easkey House, Main St, Shannonspark West, Easkey, Co Sligo. 096-49794.

puddingrow.ie

Dervla James has been looking up from her newborn occasionally to tease customers during their winter closure with Facebook photographs from her lovely cafe in Easkey. I came across a picture of my own first born grinning over his Pudding Row bagel with bacon and cream cheese. Dervla and husband Johnny Conlon have taken a break and should be open again on the top floor of the tourism centre in Easkey by now. Top of my list to try next time is the Burren Smokehouse peppered mackerel salad with potatoes and fresh leaves. Roll on surfing season. **CC**

Pudding
Row,
Easkey,
Co
Sligo.

East by The Rocket Man

38 Princes Street, Cork. www.therocketman.ie

Jack Crotty is one of my food heroes. I can't tell whether my admiration comes more from loving his delicious falafels at East in the beautiful Winthrop Arcade or digging the inventive salads at his first business, The Rocket Man, on Princes Street. Or maybe it's because of his innovative projects such as Food on Board highlighting issues around food waste at the Body & Soul festival. All I know is if Crotty is involved, I'm into it. **AMcE**

Café Rua

New Antrim Street/Spencer Street, Castlebar, Co Mayo. 094-9286072.

www.caferua.com

The original Café Rua was opened by Ann McMahon on New Antrim Street in Castlebar in 1995. She passed on the business to her children, brother and sister team Aran and Colleen, who expanded the business into a second space, a deli, shop and cafe on Spencer Street. There are homemade scones and breads in the deli, and signature salad plates with herby hummus in the cafe. There's melted Cooleeney brie cheese and Kelly's sausages stuffed into sandwiches, and good coffee to go with it all. The shop is stocked with the best of Ireland's pantry goods and a selection of overseas treats, too. **AMcE**

ADVERTISEMENT

DESTINATION PLATES

The Green Barn

Burtown House and Garden, Athy, Co Kildare. 059-8623148.

www.burtownhouse.ie/green-barn-shop

A family runs The Green Barn at Burtown House outside Athy and it's a lovely spot to bring the kids. I would be overstating my parenting success to say they wolf down their greens when they have a view of the spectacular kitchen garden where some (or all of them) grew, but it does help. And the grown ups get to taste the place in a restaurant where the food clocks up minutes from soil to plate rather than miles. Beet and goat's cheese is a boring restaurant staple in other places, but here it was a rediscovery of why some food clichés just work. **CC**

The
Green

The Duck

Marlfield House Hotel and Restaurant, Courtown Road, Gorey, Co Wexford. 053-942 1124. www.marlfieldhouse.com/dining/the-duck

There's a hard-working heart to The Duck in Gorey, the restaurant in the grounds of Marlfield House where weddings are the main business in the big house. Chef Mary Bowe ran the big house for decades before passing on the baton to the next generation. The Duck is a younger place in an old stone building in the courtyard. It means that customers can eat here even when the house is booked for a wedding. Sunday lunch is a multi-generational affair with sharing platters for light bites or the full three-course treatment to suit everyone's tastes around the table. **CC**

The Burren Storehouse

Kincora Road, Lisdoonvarna, Co Clare. 065- 7074084. www.roadsidetavern.ie

Last year Lisdoonvarna got a new food venue, disguised as a music venue. The Burren Storehouse and Kieran's Kitchen is a barn of a place built between Birgitta and Peter Curtin's smokehouse and their pub. They cook great pizzas for the kids if they like pizza and offer specials from the boats, farms and smokehouse for the grown ups, such as the wild Redbank mussels with clams I had there, a big luscious bowl of them. A happy food memory from a summer's evening in one of my favourite Irish towns. **CC**

The
Burren
Storehouse,
Co
Clare

The Oarsman Bar and Café

Bridge St, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim. 071-9621733. www.theoarsman.com

The quality of the food in the Oarsman Bar and Café in Carrick-on-Shannon makes sense when you read that brothers Conor and Ronan Maher are members of Slow Food Ireland. They took over the pub 15 years ago and started putting local produce centre stage, such as free range "velvet" pork from Mayo farmers Andarl Farm. Half portions for kids are done as standard and you'll regularly find more sustainable fish such as ling on the menu. **CC**

Hazel Mountain Chocolate Factory, Shop and Café

Oughtmama, Bellharbour, Co Clare. 065-7078847. www.hazelmountainchocolate.com

You might not expect to find a chocolate factory in the middle of the Burren but thanks to John and Kasha Connolly, the Hazel Mountain chocolate factory, shop and café is exceeding expectations. They're one of only a handful of bean-to-bar chocolate makers in Ireland, overseeing every stage of the chocolate process from cacao bean to chocolate bar. Their hot chocolate is out of this world. They also opened a new chocolate shop and cacao brew bar on Middle Street in Galway city late last year, so city slickers can easily avail of their fantastic chocolate produce. **AMcE**

Firehouse Bakery and Café

Delgany, Wicklow. 085-1561984. www.thefirehouse.ie

This bakery and cafe is a haven for bread and baked goods lovers. Not only are Patrick Ryan and Laura Moore's team of skilled bakers creating some of the crustiest, yummiest sourdough in the country, but they're also making great soups, salads and sandwich fillers to go with it. And that's not even mentioning the pizza made in their wood-fired ovens, or the cakes... oh, the cakes. Part of a complex of independent businesses that includes Roasted Brown's roastery, The Pigeon House and The Delgany Grocer, this is a food destination with serious chops. **AMcE**

Firehouse
Bakery
and
Cafe,
Co
Wicklow

Teach an Tea – Aran Cafe & Tea Rooms

Inis Oírr, Aran Islands, Co Galway. 099-75092. www.cafearan.ie

Teach an Tea is run out of the first floor of Alissa and Micheál Donoghue's family home on Inis Oírr, the smallest of the Aran Islands. They started with cakes, tea and coffee when they first opened in 2005, expanding into lunchtime with quiches and freshly caught mackerel (when available), using as much home-grown produce as possible, such as potatoes and herbs. They feature local produce on their menu, such as Aran Goat Cheese made by Gabriel and Orla Faherty on Inis Mór, and chicken from The Friendly Farmer in Galway. Open from Easter to September/October. **AMcE**

MEAT MASTERS

Oxmantown

St Mary's Abbey, Dublin 7. 01-8047030. www.oxmantown.com

The ham and cheese sambo is much maligned by its filling station incarnation as plastic ham and clammy cheese in white sliced pan. But Oxmantown rehabilitates the artform. In this small stylish place ham and cheese means thready bits of ham hock, nutty Gruyère, roasted tomatoes and pickles, all on sourdough from the nearby Arún Bakery. They put Jack McCarthy's black pudding into their breakfast sandwich with tomato relish, pickles and house mayo. The Kanturk butcher is also the man behind their sausage sandwiches. An equally rigorous degree of taste is applied to their salads. **CC**

The Fatted Calf

Church St, Loughanaskin, Athlone, Co Westmeath. 090-6433371.

www.thefattedcalf.ie

The Fatted Calf moved from a huddled village pub into a shiny new build in Athlone a couple of years ago but managed to keep its head in the right place. They hold a regular Beef Club tasting menu with matching wines for €60 a head, a place to head to if you've ever wondered what all the fuss around wagyu beef is about. A selection of 30-day dry aged beef is chosen by butcher Allan Morris from Longford meat specialist John Stone Beef. As the world rushes to fast-reared, corn-fed beef, this is a proper place to appreciate the merits of grass fed beef. **CC**

L'Atmosphere*

19 Henrietta Street, Waterford city. 051-858426. restaurant-latmosphere.com

Julia Child called boeuf bourguignon "one of the most delicious beef dishes concocted by man" and when the lid of the cast iron pot is lifted in Waterford's French restaurant L'Atmosphere, you see what she meant. Beef is cooked so slowly that it barely needs a nudge with a fork to fall apart, a harsh glare would probably do it. The dish comes to the table in its cooking pot, needing just some crusty bread to mop up the juices. Look past the terrible website with its weirdly green tinged food photograph. What they lack in web smarts, L'Atmosphere makes up for in old-school French cooking. **CC**

The Ballymore Inn

Main Street Kimmeens, Ballymore Eustace, Co Kildare. 045-864585.

ballymoreinn.com

Another great family-friendly venue, the Ballymore Inn takes its meat as seriously as the rest of its menu. Georgina and Barry O'Sullivan serve West Cork dry aged beef which is worth the trip

to the sticks. Their chicken liver pâté is a classic rendition of this simple but luxurious way of using up all the edible bits of the bird. Even after celebrating 20 years on the road, this is an Inn that shows no signs of dumbing things down or taking the shortcuts so often associated with pub food. **CC**

The
Ballymore
Inn,
Co
Kildare

Chameleon Restaurant*

1 Lower Fownes St, Temple Bar, Dublin 2. 01-6710362. chameleonrestaurant.com

The chalkboard outside Indonesian restaurant Chameleon in Temple Bar boasts the “tastiest steamed buns in Dublin”. This restaurant has been on the scene for more than 20 years and serves set menus or smaller bites from a tapas list. The Javanese short rib spiced with star anise is a master class in what slow cooking can do to the texture and flavour of meat. The chicken is free range and they serve the tastier brown meat that comes from the legs and thighs. **CC**

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CASUAL

Piglet*

Cow's Lane, Temple Bar, Dublin 2. 01-7079786.

www.facebook.com/PigletWineBar

Wine importer Enrico Fantasia named his new wine bar after a mezza luna knife with a piglet for a handle that was hanging over the door when he first walked into the former cafe. He brought a serious wine list and a food ambition that extended beyond the typical platters of cured meats and bowls of olives that wine bar folk assume will do. Small bites of big flavours packed onto sourdough toasts, such as bean puree with smoked eel and luscious shards of goat bacon, combine the best of Italian and Irish food under one simple, friendly roof. **CC**

Piglet
Cow's
Lane,
Dublin
2

Iyer's

38 Popes Quay, Shandon, Cork. 087-6409079.

The best kind of vegetarian food is when you don't notice it is vegetarian. Iyer's on Cork's Pope's Quay proves that pleasure lies in hand crafted food. Don't like cauliflower? Try Gautham Iyer's pakoras baked in a crisp batter with sweet and sour chutney on one side and a minty spiced sauce on the other. Ditto Brussels sprouts, that he turns into sprout lollipops. It's a wonderful combination of southern Indian cooking such as fermented dosa pancakes and good local ingredients. This tiny cafe on the sunny side of the river is one of my favourite Cork spots. **CC**

Good Things

68 Bridge Street, Skibbereen, West Cork. 028-51948. thegoodthingscafe.com

Carmel Somers started out in the “wild west” of Durrus, at the Sheep's Head Peninsula in West Cork nearly 15 years ago. Last year she moved her Good Things Café to a lovely corner building in Skibbereen. Her beet hummus, caponata and white bean and rosemary puree with salt-crusted bread had a colleague virtually licking the plate. The smoked mackerel starter with pickled gooseberries and red cabbage is perfect place on a plate. Good Things is simple but fabulous, a lot like West Cork. **CC**

Ard Bia at Nimmos**Spanish Arch, Long Walk, Galway. 091-561 114. www.ardbia.com**

There's a big splodge of cake mix on a page in my copy of the *Ard Bia Cookbook* by cafe owner Aoibheann MacNamara and food writer Aoife Carrigy. The chocolate cake has just five ingredients, all of them good. Ard Bia is a place where you can almost feel the tug of the Corrib flowing outside the thick stone walls down by Galway's Spanish Arch. Tuck yourself in at one of Aoibheann's wooden tables for a Middle Eastern style lunch or comforting hot bowls. Dinner has more Nordic notes, made with ingredients from the area's brilliant food scene. **CC**

Ard
Bia
at
Nimmos,
Co
Galway

Orso**8 Pembroke St, Cork. 021-243 8000. www.orso.ie**

Food from the country we'll call Ottolenghiland is the offering in Orso, Cork's lovely hardworking bar and kitchen. The breakfast special manoushi of flatbread with blood pudding, poached egg, sweet onions, tomatoes, cheese and coriander is the breakfast roll for a new generation, except way tastier. In the evening the Middle Eastern theme means options such as Moroccan spiced seafood stew and a fennel and black sesame crusted pork fillet. **CC**

Gaillot et Gray**58 Clanbrassil St, Dublin 8. 01-4547781. facebook.com/GaillotGrayP**

A sizeable chunk of our weekly food budget is spent on Gaillot et Gray brioche loaves and sourdough boules. But it is more than just a great bakery. The pizza menu is short but delicious: proper paper thin crisp air pockets in the sourdough base toasted in a woodfired oven and then topped with fresh ingredients including the all-important French note (this is a French pizzeria) that comes from Emmental cheese. There are lots of takeout customers, but the main shared table still manages to be a welcome space for families and there's a courtyard out the back for roving toddlers (or teens) in good weather. **CC**

ADVERTISEMENT

Gaillot
et
Gray,
Dublin
8

Cirillo's***140 Baggot St, Dublin 2. 01-6766848. www.cirillos.ie**

For a stretch there, it seemed that every new restaurant was an Italian and Cirillo's stood out from the crowd. They shipped their woodfired pizza oven from Naples along with a serious-minded attitude to pizza. The house dough is proved for 30 hours and their excellent pasta is made from scratch and combined with properly satisfying ingredients. If you like the dolce side of life, the lemon mousse with boozy Amaretto soaked cherries will hit the pleasure spot. **CC**

Two Cooks**5 Canal View, Sallins, Co Kildare. 045-853768. twocooks.ie**

There's no broth spoiling going on in Two Cooks in Sallins where husband and wife team Nicola Curran and Josef Zammit are the cooks. Nicola looks after the front of house. And the desserts are designed by her. Diagnosed with gestational diabetes while pregnant with their second child, she devised lighter dessert recipes with less refined sugar in them. The cooking in

Two Cooks is sophisticated but not fussy. House sourdough and soused mackerel were highlights when I visited, and the ham hock with bacon cream. **CC**

Mayfield Eatery*

7-11 Terenure Road North, Dublin 6W. 01-4926830. mayfield.ie

Since two men, both called Kevin Byrne, arrived in Terenure, took over an old butcher shop and turned it into a tiny restaurant, the place has had itself a neighbourhood restaurant with real personality. If they fret about keeping up with trends it's not obvious in the quirky refurbished furniture and more is more approach to decor (flamingo wallpaper anyone?). The original Mayfield expanded into a bigger place with a yard next door. The old butchers shop is now a separate restaurant called Fragments. Mayfield favourites include brioche French toast for brunch and the evening dish of hake in coconut milk with squash, courgette and sweet potato. And it's BYOB.**CC**

Shells Seaside Café and Little Shop

Strandhill, Co Sligo. 071-9122938. www.shellscafe.com

Myles and Jane Lamberth moved from South Africa and Dublin via Cornwall to Sligo, hoping to catch some waves and a slice of the good life. They opened Shells in 2010 in Strandhill, intending it to be a mostly seasonal business. But the locals loved it so much that they had no need to close in the winter. A glorious reflection of the creative community that lives in Strandhill; expect great coffee and comfort food served alongside one of the best vistas in Ireland. **AMcE**

Shells
Seaside
Café
and
Little
Shop
Strandhill,
Co
Sligo

The Dough Bros

Unit 1, Cathedral Buildings, Middle Street, Galway. 087-1761662. thedoughbros.ie

What started life as a pizza truck became a pop-up and then a fully fledged permanent restaurant. Or, as The Dough Bros explain it, "from street stall to high street in one year". It's all about the wood-fired pizza here in their casual restaurant on Middle Street in Galway. The crusts are blistered and smokey and the toppings range from classic to clever. There are Margheritas and Neopolitans for the purists alongside topping combos such as Hail Caesars an ode to the Caesar salad for pizza lovers who want something a little outside the pizza box.

AMcE

Locks

1 Windsor Terrace, Portobello, Dublin 8. 01-4163655. locksrestaurant.ie

For a while, Locks was all about the room. A time piece on the canal away from the bustle of the city centre, it was a place to step off the treadmill and sink into a bottle of wine or two of an afternoon. The grand old barge was almost scuppered by the landing and then loss of a Michelin star, until a new generation of chefs took it over. They made it more about the food, with the gorgeous room as a backdrop. Chef Connor O'Dowd whips up clever simple things such as trout and dillisk butter. Throughout its choppy years, Locks has always been lovely. Now it's a seriously good place to eat as well. **CC**

ADVERTISEMENT

Wild Honey Inn

Kincora Road, Lisdoonvarna, Co Clare. 065-7074300. wildhoneyinn.com

Chef Aidan McGrath and his wife Kate should have dusted down their beautiful 19th century inn in Lisdoonvarna earlier this month after being closed up for the winter. This also means the doors are open again on the gastropub on the ground floor. The Wild Honey Inn is that great combination of a pub full of character and a kitchen that cares about putting the food of the Burren onto plates. So you get great Clare cheeses, platters of delights from the Burren Smokehouse, and house bread. Aidan's ham hock terrine with pickles is pub food done as it should be. **CC**

Kai

20 Sea Road, Galway. 091-526003. kaicaferestaurant.com

Head chef Jess Murphy and her husband David have been raising Galway's lunch and dinner game since they opened Kai in 2011. They start their brunch service at noon on a Sunday and before the clock strikes 12, a queue of anxious would-be-brunchers get in line in the hope of getting a table. From blood orange pancakes to their signature fish fingers coated in a buttermilk and panko crumb, every dish I've eaten at Kai has been memorable, inspiring and deeply comforting. The cake bar alone is a source of delight. **AMcE**

Kai,
Co
Galway

San Lorenzo

73-83 South Great George's Street, Dublin 2. 01-478 9383. sanlorenzos.ie

Sometimes when you're always chasing the next new thing, you forget about the great old places. San Lorenzo's is not even that old. Open just over five years, chef Temple Garner's restaurant continues to crowd-please. They got rid of the bare timber deck chair seating they first opened with and made it more clubby with booths and banquettes. The menu is still that New York Italian riff on big hearted flavours on big plates. The hake al forno with red pepper and crab peperonata is a winner of a dish. **CC**

Las Tapas de Lola

12 Wexford St, Dublin 2. 01-4244100. www.lastapasdelola.com

There's a spirit of generosity in Las Tapas de Lola that makes you feel that owners Anna and Vanessa get as much of a kick out of the place as their customers. The menu is full of the tasty plates that the couple enjoy on their regular trips to Spain to keep themselves up to speed on the food scene there. The beef cheeks with red pepper sauce and bright green herb dressing are a joy, then you slather an oil dressed anchovy onto a slice of toast. The chewy finger-sized white chorizo sausages are the things with which patatas bravas were made to go. **CC**

Richmond

43 South Richmond St, Dublin 2. 01-4788783. richmondrestaurant.ie

It's a quiet place off the beaten track but Richmond is offering Dublin's best value tasting menu. Russell Wilde and chef David O'Byrne took the old Gigs Place and turned it from a dive into a diva. Most nights they serve excellent bistro style food and once a week they dial it up a notch to play with combinations and flavours with the Tuesday Tasting menu that costs just €29.95 for five courses. Their pastry is especially good – date cake with toffee sauce, gingerbread ice cream and roasted peanuts, for example. **CC**

Four Vicars

Four Vicars Hill, Armagh BT617. 028-3752 7772. 4vicars.com

I brought a friend who bakes, makes and creates with amazing precision to Four Vicars for lunch and the bread and baking impressed the socks off both of us. Chef Gareth Reid and his wife Kasia run this handsome restaurant on a steep hill in the town. Four Vicars was once a tea room but they have turned it into a lovely restaurant, where fish from Kilkeel, Richhill chicken and vegetables from around Armagh apple country are cooked with skill and flair. **CC**

Eastern Seaboard Bar and Grill**Bryanstown Centre, Drogheda, Co Louth. 041-9802570.****facebook.com/easternseaboardbarandgrill**

There's a genuine excitement to Rueven Diaz's Facebook posts about the ingredients that arrive at the Eastern Seaboard Bar and Grill. The chef gives a regular shout out to Sonairte for vegetables such as three cornered leeks (with flowers that look like a cross between wild garlic and white bluebells), teaming them with duck hearts. The more evergreen ingredients are top notch here too, such as their seaboard selection of smoked blossom, smoked salmon, mackerel pâté and Silver Darlings pickled herring. It's a challenge to keep a big roomy restaurant innovating and on its toes, but it's one Diaz and Jeni Glasgow take to with gusto. **CC**

La Cucina**Limerick city and Castletroy, Limerick. 061-517400/061-517405. lacucina.ie**

Lorraine Fanneran and her partner Bruno Coppola have been in the food game since 2003 when they first opened the doors of La Cucina, a small casual Italian cafe and deli in Castletroy, just outside Limerick City. Last November, they opened the doors of La Cucina Centro in the city centre, a bigger, bolder, more modern version of the original. The look might have been updated but the soul is still deeply rooted in the good old-fashioned Italian love of food and family. **AMcE**

Curragower Bar & Restaurant**Clancy's Strand, Limerick. 061-321 788. curragower.com**

Named after an ancient crossing point for goats across The Shannon, The Curragower Bar & Restaurant is one of those rare breeds of pubs that pays as much attention to its food as it does to its drink, and we have the Bourke family to thank for that. They've been in charge here since the late 1990s. Served alongside Dublin's Five Lamps Lager and the local Treaty City's Harris Pale Ale, you'll find bowls of steaming chowder, plump mussels from Doolin and Dingle Bay crab claws. It's simple, but it's done right. **AMcE**

Forest & Marcy**126 Leeson Street Upper, Dublin 4. 01-6602480. forestandmarcy.ie**

It's probably a symptom of success that the team behind Forest & Marcy had their Christmas party in February. This little sister to Forest Avenue opened in the old Rigby's on Leeson Street, with barely enough room to swing a Brussels sprout. The payoff for squeezing into this wine bar is Ciaran Sweeney's stellar cooking. The fermented potato bread with foamy bacon cream and crinkly shards of cabbage is probably the best €8 you'll spend on food in Dublin. Desserts are divine too and they now take reservations, so no need to hover anxiously over the phone at a nearby bar waiting for the call to come and eat. **CC**

Osteria Lucio**The Malting Tower, Clanwilliam Terrace, Grand Canal Quay, Dublin 2. 01-6624199. osterialucio.com**

This Italian restaurant tucked in under a railway bridge off a cobbled docklands street is grounded in a food friendship between chefs Ross Lewis and mentor Luciano Tona. Lewis isn't cooking here but he has brought a finesse to the food while the founding principle of using only the best ingredients completes the Italian side of the partnership. The pizza is spectacular, the vegetables are given pride of place and the olives reminded my Sicilian friend of the ones he picked and cured in a huge jar with his grandfather as a child. **CC**

Delahunt**39 Camden St Lower, Dublin 8. 01-5984880. delahunt.ie**

Carvill's off-licence was an old place that fell into young hands in 2013 when the beautiful building was bought and slowly (over 18 months) turned into Delahunt. The restaurant held

onto all that was lovely about the old shop and made it home to some very special food. Head chef Dermot Staunton brings a sensible amount of chef finesse to seasonal Irish produce, with beautiful results. And the upstairs bar is an excellent place to start the evening. **CC**

ADVERTISEMENT

Delahunt
Restaurant,
Dublin
8

SPECIAL OCCASION

Ox

1 Oxford Street, Belfast. 028-90314121. oxbelfast.com

If there is anyone who can weather the head melting challenges of Brexit in Northern Ireland, it is the team behind Ox. They opened in the teeth of flag protests after transforming a former tile shop into a restaurant that doesn't serve steak and has no deep fat fryer. Chef Stephen Toman and front of house business partner Alain Kerloc'h created a beautiful new idea in the Belfast dining scene and good things have rippled out from Ox. Toman's cooking style has grown along with his suppliers and his supporters into some of the best on the island. **CC**

Lady Helen

**Mount Juliet Estate, Thomastown, Co Kilkenny. 056-7773000.
mountjuliet.ie/the-lady-helen**

Back in the day, all Michelin starred restaurants looked like the Lady Helen in Mount Juliet. The elegant hotel dining room where you'll eat produce from their kitchen garden and farm brought Kilkenny one of its two Michelin stars in 2014. Head chef Ken Harker teams gutsy flavours with delicacy such as a recent rabbit and langoustine sweet onion and lemon tortellini dish that prompted the Michelin man into a complimentary tweet recently. They are due to open a restaurant in the hotel yard this month. **CC**

Chapter One

18-19 Parnell Square, Dublin 1. 01-8732266. chapteronerestaurant.com

Ross Lewis's basement restaurant in Dublin's Parnell Square had a big year last year with the retirement of Maitre d' Martin Corbett. It's been 21 years since Lewis did a *stage* at El Bulli with Ferran Adrià and returned home with fresh ideas of how to team Irish ingredients with gastronomic parlour tricks. Lewis shows no signs of slowing down and his obsession with produce is the backbone of his restaurant. I still remember a sweetcorn soup from nearly seven years ago. Friday and Saturday nights are booked out for months but the pre-theatre menu for €39.50 is a proper steal. **CC**

The Idle Wall

The Quay, Westport, Co Mayo. 098-50692. theidlewall.ie

Chef Áine Maguire now runs the restaurant where she celebrated her 18th and 21st birthday parties. Taking over Quay Cottage in Westport was a homecoming for the Mayo woman after a decade in Dublin. She spruced up the beautiful building and reopened it as The Idle Wall. Her smoked butter is the stuff of food dreams. I slathered it on goose-fat roasted potatoes with slow roasted shoulder of lamb with clams, in what was a terrific plate of Irish food. Buttermilk pannacotta was a memorably good dessert. **CC**

Sage

The Courtyard, Main St, Midleton, Co Cork. 021-4639682. sagerestaurant.ie

If you are going to source most of your food from a 12-mile radius of your front door, there are probably few better places to situate your restaurant than Midleton in Cork. Chef Kevin Aherne has fertile fields, committed farmers and producers and waves full of fish and seafood for a

larder and he makes great use of his wonderful ingredients. Sage has grown with a courtyard space. In the main restaurant they've ditched the avocado green walls and gone for something a little more golden hued and grown up. **CC**

Sage
The
Courtyard,
Co
Cork

The Tannery

10 Quay St, Dungarvan, Co Waterford. 058-45420. tannery.ie

Paul and Máire Flynn's Tannery Restaurant turns 20 this year, which makes me feel old. The Tannery doesn't, thanks to the energy and ambition that drives it. Since his first cookbook *An Adventure in Irish Food*, Flynn has been an important voice in the Irish food scene. Big name London chefs such as Fergus Henderson and Angela Hartnett have cooked and eaten within its walls and the kitchen has kept a consistent standard that got them through rocky times. The Helvick crab crème brûlée has a special place in my food crush compendium. **CC**

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The Greenhouse

Dawson St, Dublin 2. 01-6767015. thegreenhouserestaurant.ie

Mikael Viljanen loves winter and blood. The chef in the Greenhouse challenges his suppliers with a request for blood to create hare royale or, more recently, duck royale, the meat drenched in a sauce made from its own blood. But it's not all intensity and darkness. There is lightness and fun here too. You get the impression from his Twitter feed that the next seasonal gift from the soil or the sea eases him through the seasons. The Greenhouse feels like a corporate venue but the real business here is Viljanen's amazing cooking. **CC**

Aniar

53 Lower Dominick St, Galway. 091-535947. aniarrestaurant.ie

Aniar's Michelin star four years ago marked a big shift for the red book in Ireland, away from po-faced fine dining rooms and gleaming linen. The then head chef Enda McEvoy was cooking in what looked like a coffee shop, but it was only the food that mattered. The star marked Galway's food renaissance, which has been gaining in strength. When McEvoy moved on, chef-owner JP McMahon stepped into the kitchen and did an impressive job maintaining the star, along with running the other family restaurants Cava and Massimo, and organising and hosting Food on the Edge. **CC**

Loam

Fairgreen, Galway. 091-569727. loamgalway.com

Enda McEvoy, a literature and sociology graduate who staged in Noma and worked in the short-lived Sheridans on the Docks, left Aniar in 2013 and opened his own place at the end of 2014. He called it Loam after the kind of soil that grows great things. Michelin gave him a star after less than a year in business. He has been sourcing his meat from the same farm run by two brothers since he started cheffing in Galway. His tasting menu is a masterclass in delicious sustainable eating. Mutton hung for three weeks before being cooked carefully is a taste I will remember for a long time. **CC**

Bastible

11 South Circular Road, Dublin 8. 01-4737409. bastible.com

I was through the door faster than a rat down a drain when Bastible first opened in November 2015. My excuse for such an unseemly hurry? It's in my neighbourhood and I was pretty sure it would get very busy very quickly. And so it came to pass. Chef Barry Fitzgerald does a tight three-course €38 menu with a short set of options to keep the prices keen and the food great.

The deeply good flavours in Bastible come not just from great ingredients but from quiet work in the hours before service, such as house pickling, sourdough and butter making. **CC**

Etto

18 Merrion Row, Dublin 2. 01-6788872. etto.ie

I loved Etto from the first greedy bite. The small wine bar opened in a former Govindas on Merrion Row in the autumn of 2013. It's a busy spot, so worth planning ahead for a table. The pre-theatre menu at €28 is the best value in town. A recent menu featured white beetroot Treviso, a pig trotter carpaccio and, of course, the signature dessert of prunes steeped in red wine until they almost disintegrate into jam, served with a dollop of vanilla mascarpone for a full smile-inducing treat. **CC**

Deanes Eipic

28-40 Howard St, Belfast. 028-90331134. deaneseipic.com

Although he said it did his business no harm when he lost his Michelin star in 2011, Belfast chef Michael Deane had a new one in his sights when he opened Eipic. He brought back a food dynamo in the shape of chef Danni Barry as head chef and she quickly won a star, becoming Ireland's first woman chef since Myrtle Allen to hold one. Her menus are smart and full of locality and flavour, featuring ingredients such as cured hogget, creamy Abernethy butter and beef from Glenarm shorthorns. She also has a great £60 vegetarian menu. **CC**

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House Restaurant at The Cliffhouse

Ardmore, Co Waterford. 024-87800. thecliffhousehotel.com

There are few dining rooms in Ireland that give you the feeling of levitating over the sea on a summer's evening like you do in House Restaurant at the Cliffhouse Hotel in Ardmore. Chef Martijn Kajuter joined the Cliffhouse a decade ago and shows no sign of slowing down, although he is training his successors. His menus take a more is more approach to techniques and ideas designed to put layers onto the plate. Take his garden beetroot dish. It's wood-smoked, marinated, cured and finally iced before serving. And that's just one of the ingredients on the plate. Phew. **CC**

Cafe Paradiso

16 Lancaster Quay, Mardyke, Cork. 021-4277939. paradiso.restaurant

We've all had bad vegetarian food: the muddy flavours and mushy textures that push us back into the arms of a juicy steak, or make us reach for some crispy chicken skin. Denis Cotter makes each vegetable sing its separate songs, with produce from local growers given a Californian feel (Jerusalem artichokes get called sunchokes) along with Japanese touches such as miso butter and togarashi or Japanese chilli. There was a plan two years ago to open a Dublin outpost but it didn't happen. We vegetable-loving city dwellers live in hope. **CC**

Canteen

4 Main St Celbridge, Co Kildare. 01-6274967. canteencelbridge.com

James Sheridan and Soizic Humbert made the move to a bigger room in Celbridge and passed on their tiny canteen in Blackrock Market to the lads behind Heron & Grey. Canteen Celbridge is pleasing their new bigger crowd with inventive, heart-felt cooking. Their spring menu includes hogget and wild brill. Close your eyes when you're eating the apple tart tatin and you're in a Normandy oak-beamed inn surrounded by an orchard. **CC**

Canteen,
Co
Kildare

Mr Fox**38 Parnell Square, Dublin 1. 01-8747778. mrfox.ie**

Chef Joy Beattie broke the ground in a basement on the grittier west side of Parnell Square. The Hot Stove was an excellent restaurant, but Joy moved on. Stephen McAllister of The Pig's Ear took over the place and installed Anthony Smith as head chef. Deer tartare and cod with corn succotash were excellent, along with fun tributes to sweetshop and ice lolly favourites. There's an impressive vegetarian menu too. **CC**

Heron & Grey**Blackrock Market, 19A Main Street, Blackrock, Co Dublin. 01-2123676.****heronandgrey.com**

Tucked away down a lane in the belly of Blackrock Market is a deceptively unassuming restaurant. Australian chef Damien Grey teamed up with Dublin front-of-house manager Andrew Heron and within a year of opening they were rewarded with a Michelin star in 2016. Pleasantly laid-back about service but deeply serious about the food, this is a refreshing take on the Michelin standard. Expect modern Antipodean and Asian influences on impeccable Irish ingredients. Bookings are hard to come by, but get your name on the waiting list and start praying for a cancellation. **AMcE**

Forest Avenue**8-9 Sussex Terrace, Dublin 4. 01-6678337. forestavenuerestaurant.ie**

Sandy and John Wyer opened Forest Avenue in 2013 after working together in kitchens around Europe and in Dublin. Every time I return to Forest Avenue, whether for their five-course brunch menu (sadly discontinued, but their lunch is still exquisite) or a special occasion dinner served in their minimal yet cosy dining room, I'm struck by how talented, thoughtful and dedicated they are. Though, bafflingly, a Michelin star has thus far eluded them, these two are stars in my eyes. **AMcE**

The Muddlers Club**Warehouse Lane, Belfast, BT1 2DX. +44-2890313199.****themuddlersclubbelfast.com**

I love what chef Gareth McCaughey, former sous chef at Michelin-starred Ox, is doing at The Muddlers Club on Warehouse Lane in Belfast's city centre. The approach here is that glorious marriage of fine dining influence without any of the fuss or pomp. Expect fantastic produce carefully handled and served in a relaxed atmosphere. **AMcE**

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FISH & SEAFOOD**Fish Shop****6 Queen Street, Dublin 2. 01-4308594. fish-shop.ie**

In a simple room on a quiet stretch of Queen Street, a long-needed revolution happened in mid-range dining for fish and seafood lovers. I mean we're a city by the sea for cod's sake. Fish Shop started as just that, a fish and chip shop, and then became a restaurant when its second outlet on Benburb Street took over the chip bit. Now they serve a gorgeous €39 tasting menu based on what's been landed hours before, along with a short but whip-smart drinks selection. **CC**

Catch 22**28 South Anne St, Dublin 2. 01-6139018. catch-22.ie**

Sometimes you just want to sit and munch a big pot of steaming mussels with wine-softened onions still clinging to their flesh while watching the world go by. You can do just that in Catch 22 on South Anne Street. They do a great mug of whitebait fried in polenta crumb to get you going swimmingly. Carlingford oysters are also on the menu here. **CC**

L'Escale

The Pier, Schull, West Cork. 028-28599. facebook.com/lescale.fishnchips

It's not a year-round restaurant but when it arrives, so does summer. French seafood exporter Xavier Legris opens his seasonal L'Escale lobster restaurant at the pier in the West Cork village of Schull every summer. Look past the picnic tables and plastic wind break. The house speciality is lobster straight from the tank, boiled and served with a side of great chips and French pop radio playing loud. Formidable as they say in Schull dans l'été. **CC**

L'Escale,
Schull,
Co
Cork

O'Grady's on the Pier

Seapoint, Barna Co Galway 092-592223. ogradysonthepier.com

Killary mussels and Rossaveal crab along with views over Galway bay to the Burren are some of the delights at O'Grady's on the Pier at Barna. There are few better places to combine stout with seafood. A dish of butter fried plaice with floury potatoes was memorably good. This lovely old pub has a real holiday feel but deserves to be a year-round venue. **CC**

Moran's Oyster Cottage

Kilcolgan, Co Galway. 091-796113. moransoystercottage.com

The oldest establishment on this list, Moran's Oyster Cottage in Kilcolgan will have been serving food for half a century this year. The 300-year-old cottage pub grew a huge extension out the back, like a mussel giving birth to an oyster. They serve traditional seafood and have a wall of fame of celebrities who have passed through their doors, when eating oysters in the west of Ireland was a more exotic activity. Go for the native edulis oysters. With their heavy round shells, grown for much longer, they're an exquisite change from the teardrop shaped fast growing Pacific oyster. **CC**

Cervi

2-3 Drury St, Dublin 2. 01-6799009. supermisssue.com/cervi

Take some sourdough bread, a chunky tangy tartare sauce and some crushed peas. Add a couple of pieces of fried fish and you have Cervi's fish finger sandwich (or buttie, as they insist on calling it). It's not pretty. It definitely should not be eaten on a date. But it is very good. Cervi is named after Guiseppe Cervi, the man they say opened Dublin's first chipper in the 1880s. The chips here are the best in town. **CC**

Taste at Rustic

17 South Great George's St, Dublin 2. 01-5267701. tasteatrustic.com

When I finally got to Taste at Rustic, it was a discovery. Gossamer delicate and punchy gutsy tastes get together in this cosy upstairs place. Sashimi or raw fish is a no-brainer for an island nation but we still haven't got our heads around the freshness needed in the raw ingredients to make fish and seafood proper sashimi grade. Dylan McGrath's blow torched scallops are an example of what can be done. Served quivering, almost raw, he combines them with avocado, citrusy yuzu and black garlic crumb for maximum effect. **CC**

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Lobstar

101 Monkstown Road, Monkstown, Co Dublin. 01-5373323. lobstar.ie

You can take your claw crackers to a beast in its shell or go for the lobster roll where the kitchen has done the foraging for you, but either way Lobstar in Monkstown is all about the crustacean. They do lobster at least three ways – in the shell, in a butter drizzled roll, or

wrapped in ravioli. Galway Bay oysters are delicious here too and the pastry cheffing is high-end for a neighbourhood joint, with great house bread and top notch desserts. **CC**

The Oyster Bar

Temple Bar Food Market, Meeting House Square, Temple Bar, Dublin 2

In the heart of the Temple Bar Food Market on a Saturday is the Oyster Bar, where you can sit down to a selection of shucked Pacific rock oysters or native oysters (when in season), mostly sourced from Sligo. A dozen oysters comes with a complimentary glass of perfunctory white wine. The combination of those zingy oysters, the fresh air and a sip of the hair of the dog makes it one of the best hangover cures in the city. **AMcE**

Klaw

5A Crown Alley, Temple Bar, Dublin 2. klaw.ie

Customers are as cozy as clams in this little shellfish bar in the heart of Temple Bar, run by seafood enthusiast Niall Sabongi, who refers to Klaw as “crabshack dining.” With oysters, lobster rolls and crab on toast sprinkled with Old Bay seasoning, Sabongi seems to be on a crusade to make seafood accessible again. It’s a cause I can get behind. **AMcE**

WORLD FOOD

Hang Dai

20 Camden Street Lower, Dublin 2. 01-4548888. hangdaichinese.com

Two school friends, Karl Whelan and Will Dempsey, dreamt about bringing a wider taste of Chinese food to Dublin in a fun but serious restaurant. Late last year Hang Dai was born on Camden Street, looking like a Chinese takeaway at the front and hiding a disco cave of a place behind the hatch. Duck is the thing here. The West Cork Skeaghanore birds are roasted in a wood fired oven. The bill (an actual duck’s bill) comes just before the bill. **CC**

Miyazaki*

1A Evergreen St, Ballypheane, Cork. 021-4312716. facebook.com/miyazakicork

Chef Takashi Miyazaki produces exquisite bowls of food in a takeaway on a quiet street, like a busker giving a Carnegie Hall performance, just for the pleasure of it. Miyazaki is a regular sushi takeaway, but the magic lives on the specials board and a visit on a day when the chef has been able to source fresh fish for sashimi. Pull up a stool, take the bowl into your lap to ensure your chopsticks don’t drop a morsel and taste island cooking from a food culture several steps further along. **CC**

Pho Viet*

162 Parnell St, Dublin 1. 01-8783165. phoviet.ie

The Vietnamese broth they serve in this friendly place by the huge steaming bowlful is a food antidote to squally spring weather. They start with spiced house made stock with onions, scallions, rice noodles and coriander. The Vietnamese for cow is bo, just like as gaeilge, so the €9.50 Pho bo comes with up to three cuts of meat: brisket, sirloin or flank. If you want to push the boat out you can add a fourth cut of meat for €1. Then it’s up to you how much fresh mint, beansprouts, lemon wedges and birds eye chillies you add. **CC**

Aroi Artisan Street Food*

1 O’Connell St Limerick. 061-311411. aroi.eu

Since I ate in their first restaurant in Limerick, Aroi has become something of a chain, opening branches in Cork and Kilkenny, according to their website. Chef Eddie Ong Chok serves Malaysian food with good ingredients and craft, avoiding the MSG and sugar typically lorried into food in this price bracket. I had green papaya shredded into a great salad and hake with a 12-hour sauce made with wild ginger imported from London. **CC**

Okayu**71 North Strand Road, Dublin 3. 01-8194741. okayu.ie**

A small white room decorated with small silken things and origami flowers, Okayu is a charming Japanese takeaway on a stretch of North Strand Road in Dublin's north inner city. You can sip green tea while you wait and even eat in at a small counter, but space is tight. Better still bring your miso soup home and decant it into a bowl to slurp in comfort. The okonomiyaki, sometimes described as Japanese pizza, was great, and we got sweetly fresh salmon sashimi with fresh shiso leaf, a lovely lemony mint experience. **CC**

Okayu,
Dublin
3

Pickle**43 Camden St Lower, Dublin 2. 01-5557755. picklerestaurant.com**

Even the poppadoms in Sunil Ghai's Pickle on Lower Camden Street are special. There are cassava ones, rice ones and lentil ones all served with the cracking house prawn pickle. Ghai is cooking the food from his North Indian childhood rather than the higher-end hotel style cooking he had been doing in Ireland until now. The kid goat braised with onion, garlic and black cardamom is a cracker of a dish and the yellow lentils with cumin a comforting bowl of great simple food. **CC**

Rasam**18-19 Glashule Road, Dún Laoghaire, Dublin. 01-2300600. rasam.ie**

As well as being one of the nicest men in the restaurant business, Nisheeth Tak is rigorous about Indian food. In Rasam, his beautiful Glashule restaurant over the Eagle House pub, he challenges the "one sauce fits all" idea of Indian cooking. I got a look behind the scenes for radio series *History on a Plate*, with historian Juliana Adelman, when we told the story of Dublin's oldest curry house. They were roasting a tray of extraordinary spices, roots and seeds in Rasam. A small tub livened up my cooking at home for months afterwards. **CC**

Moro Kitchen by Dada***21 Camden Street, Dublin 2. 01-4758816. morokitchen.ie**

The newest arrival on this list, Moro Kitchen is the son of Dada, the South William Street Moroccan restaurant. This is a more casual offering, with a takeaway at the front, but the same precision is being taken with cooking the food from scratch with great ingredients. The falafel are the best in town. The food can be eaten at shared tables with generous platters of tasty things that all combine together on top of a pitta toast for grin-inducing mouthfuls. Do climb the stars to the upstairs room which feels like an oasis on this busy street. **CC**

The Ramen Bar***51 William St South, Dublin 2. 01-5470658. facebook.com/RamenDublin**

At The Ramen Bar on South William Street they make ramen with that most precious of commodities in these busy days: time. A long slow simmer, of 14 hours, goes into the tonkotsu soup, a pork ramen that is the house speciality. The miso salmon is also good. Happy comforting base note flavours all served at a great price in a friendly place that feels like a secret for ramen fans. Half the fun is watching how other ramen eaters slurp theirs. **CC**

Kimchi at The Hop House**160 Parnell Street, Dublin 1. 01-8728318. hophouse.ie**

From bibimbap to bulgogi, from kimchi to doenjang zigae, Korean food makes me happy. Ireland's best Korean restaurant is located on Parnell Street where it has been under the steerage of manager and owner Kyoung Hee Lee, who moved to Dublin from Seoul in 2001, since 2006. Their sushi isn't bad but it's the traditional Korean dishes that are really worth visiting for. Try the bibimbap, a mixture of fresh vegetables, meat and an egg served in a hot

stone bowl. The chilli sauce, flavoured with the fermented chilli paste gochujang, is the key to the bibimbap's success. **AMcE**

ADVERTISEMENT

M&L Chinese Restaurant

13/14 Cathedral Street, Dublin 1. 01-8748038. mlchineserestaurant.com

M&L has been serving up traditional Sichuan food since 2008. Their dumpling chef, Li Xue, creates their amazingly fluffy, light, pot-sticker dumplings while head chef Pen Tao continues to deliver on the restaurant's most famous dish, the exquisite fried green beans doused in garlic and spicy chilli peppers. The owners, Angie Wang from Hunan province in south central China and her Irish husband Graeme Phelan, took over in 2012 and are currently working on opening a traditional tea house across the road, specialising in dim sum. **AMcE**

Wa Café

13 New Dock Street, Galway. 091-895850. wacafe.net

In a simple noodle bar near the docks in Galway, you'll find chef and owner Yoshimi Hayakawa carefully preparing sushi and serving up a ramen inspired by her hometown of Toyota. She's been gracing Galway with her real-deal sushi since opening her first stall at the Galway Market in 2002. She opened Wa Café on August 8th, 2008, partly because eight is considered a lucky number in Japanese culture. She's currently training young chef Patrick Phillips in the art of sushi making, but for now she's still behind the sushi station at Wa Café. **AMcE**

Miso Sligo

Carly Court, Stephen Street, Sligo. 071-9194986. facebook.com/misosligo

Miso Sligo is Sligo's first Korean-Japanese restaurant, and locals have been singing the praises of head chef and owner Nae Young Jung and his food since he opened in 2016. The gyoza are good, the kimchi is tangy and the sushi is delicately prepared, with fish sourced from Killybegs and Ballina. **AMcE**

Musashi

15 Capel Street, Dublin 1. 01-5328068. musashidublin.com

Musashi on Dublin's Capel Street is hard to get a table at without a reservation, even on a Tuesday night. Their secret is the consistent quality of their sushi combined with an accessible price and friendly, fast service. The business has expanded to the IFSC, Sandycove and Hogan Place, with another one on the way on Parnell Street. They are currently expanding into the space across the road at Capel Street which means more seats to go around. Good news for those looking for a quick sushi fix. **AMcE**

ABOUT THIS LIST

There is a sunny optimism to the PR people who send me emails hoping I'm well and wondering whether I would like to come to the opening of their client's restaurant. I don't go to restaurant opening nights. If I'm not paying for my dinner, then I'm not writing about it.

I am not going to climb on a high horse and finger wag at bloggers who write about their free meals, as long as they share that information with their readers. I'm in the privileged position of paying for my dinner, but then sending the receipts to *The Irish Times* – so *The Irish Times* pays for dinner. But that act of handing over the cash or card makes an important difference.

Much of what you will read about restaurants is funded by quietly selling review space to restaurants through sponsored content, plaques or membership deals.

There is nothing wrong with charging restaurants to tell people how great they are. It's called running a business. But I would like the business side of it to be made clearer. I want to know

who's paying. And I will always value the views of a restaurant critic from a reputable media organisation in a confusing babble of noise.

As a reader looking for guidance on where to eat, it is worth asking yourself: who is paying for this review and do they have my interests at heart?

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That's why this list matters.

The quest to recommend places that we think you'll love as much as we do, is the only interest at play. Restaurants, cafes and wine bars cannot buy a space on our list. These are the places that, hand on heart (and hand on wallet), Aoife McElwain and I would return to and happily spend our own money.

From fish finger sandwiches to fine dining, they are places we have been to, in real life. Which is why there are at least four that probably should be on here but I haven't gotten to yet.

Don't worry, I am coming. I'll just be booking under a different name and paying in cash. **CC**

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